

Eno River Corridor

The Eno River Corridor contains some of the most scenic and biologically important natural areas within the entire eastern Piedmont. Its diverse array of habitats include steep rhododendron covered bluffs, rocky pools and extensive riffles, prairie-like diabase glades, deeply shaded mafic cliffs, broad backswamps, and slow-moving river reaches. Its wildlife, correspondingly diverse, includes a nationally-significant fauna of freshwater mussels, snails, salamanders, fish, and other aquatic species. Its terrestrial fauna range from Ice-Age relicts, such as the redback salamander, to remnants of a Triassic Basin bottomland fauna with strong affinities to the Coastal Plain.

The Eno River Valley also provides the backbone of an entire system of corridors that link the wildlife of Durham County to refuge areas far beyond the county's boundaries. Upstream in Orange County, the Eno itself forms links with the Hillsborough Division of Duke Forest, Occaneechee Mountain, and the extensive wildlands of the Eno River Uplands—now partially protected as part of the state park. Further connections to the rural areas of northern Orange County are made via the Little River Corridor, which joins the Eno downstream from Penny's Bend. Links to Person County are similarly formed by way of the Flat River Corridor, which joins the Eno to form the Neuse River just west of the Wake County line. Downstream the Neuse provides connections to several of the most important natural areas identified in Wake County (LeGrand, 1987) and still further links exist with the broad areas of bottomlands along the Neuse that reach all the way to New Bern in the Coastal Plain.

The value of the Eno River Corridor to the region's wildlife results not only from its connections to all these other corridors, but also in the fact that a large portion of the land along its length—from the Eno River State Park to the Falls of the Neuse Gamelands—has been set aside as protected natural areas. Structurally, the string of core sanctuaries and protected links along the Eno exemplify the sort of preserve design advocated by modern, landscape level conservation theory.

The creation of the Eno River State Park and West Point City Park, in fact, is probably the best example in the entire state of this approach to conservation and well illustrates the multiple conservation values that can be protected when efforts are directed toward the landscape level rather than towards more circumscribed sites:

1. Together, these two parks preserve one of the most scenic valleys in the eastern Piedmont; an outstanding example of the steep-sloped gorges that occur along the junction of the Carolina Slate Belt and the Durham Triassic Basin—and provide a major recreational area and essential open space within the heart of one of the most urbanized regions in North Carolina.
2. They also help protect the high water quality of the Eno, which is as vital for the human inhabitants of Orange, Durham, and Wake Counties as it is for the fauna of the nationally significant Eno River Aquatic Habitat. Not only is the Eno a major regional water supply, but canoeists, kayakers, and rafters coexist on the Eno with rare freshwater mussels that have elsewhere been devastated by the creation of impoundments or from water quality degradation.